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Artists in Exile

MARCH 3 TO 28, 1942

PIERRE MATISSE
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EUROPE

HERE are fourteen artists who have come to America to live and work. They are a disparate group, but all belong to the rare company of those who have brought originality and authority to the art of their period. Their presence can mean much or little. It can mean the beginning of a period during which the American traditions of freedom and generosity may implement a new internationalism in art, centered in this country. Or it can mean the reverse; it can mean that American artists and patrons may form a xenophobic circle and wait for such men to go away, leaving our art as it was before. The choice is of a final gravity, yet no one with vision will hesitate long over it. For it would be disastrous to apply rigid standards of nationalism to the arts, however necessary these standards may be in other applications during time of war. Our enemies themselves have defined the disaster of which I speak. By declaring that art is national or that it does not exist, they have established what may well be their most absolute perversion of truth.

Fortunately, numbers of American artists and interested laymen are aware that a sympathetic relationship with refugee painters and sculptors can have a broadening effect on native tradition, while helping to preserve the cultural impetus of Europe. These Americans reject the isolationist viewpoint which ten years ago sought refuge, and an excuse, in Regionalism and the American Scene movement. They know that art transcends geography. They understand that while remote and solitary

creation benefits an occasional American painter, many of our best artists mature by working with full comprehension of contemporary European movements, accepting or rejecting the tenets of these movements with confidence and sensitivity. These men know that if the world is not lost its borders must narrow, its lines of communication quicken and extend, until ideas achieve an almost immediate parlance around the earth. They want American art to have equal voice with that of Europe in the new world, but they check their ambition at this point, knowing that beyond lies the dread bait of imperialism which all men of heart must suspect.

Meanwhile, the arts are the only currency left which cannot be counterfeited and which may be passed from nation to nation and from people to people. It is true that this currency must now be smuggled part of the way by men for whom beauty stifles the pulse of terror. But it will some day return openly to the captive lands, and in America — let us make sure — it will never be refused or unjustly deflated. These fourteen artists have brought us art in high denomination. Let us therefore say to them, for their sakes but also for ours: "Welcome, and welcome again."

Farmington, Conn. JAMES THRALL SOBY

CATALOGUE

1. BERMAN	"To the Glory of the Setting Sun" 1941
2. BRETON	"Poem-Object, Portrait of the Actor A B" 1941
3. CHAGALL	"The Dream" 1939
4. ERNST	"Europe after the Rain" 1942
5. LEGER	"Study for the Divers" 1942
6. LIPCHITZ	"The Rape of Europa II" (bronze) 1938 *Courtesy of the Buchholz Gallery*
7. MASSON	"The Seeded Earth" 1942 *Courtesy of the Buchholz Gallery*
8. MATTA	"The Initiation" 1941
9. MONDRIAN	"Picture" 1935-42
10. OZENFANT	"Fugue" 1922-27
11. SELIGMANN	"Borealis Efflorescence" 1941
12. TANGUY	"Time and Again" 1942
13. TCHELITCHEW	"The Green Lion" 1942
14. ZADKINE	"Pomona" (ebony) 1942

AMERICA

THE precarious condition of Europe in the Thirties, the growing danger of war and finally the outbreak of hostilities brought many artists and intellectuals of the Old World to seek refuge in the New; the situation in France after the armistice increased this influx. What the immigrant hand laborer or political refugee, intellectual or artist, expect first of all when they come to America is to find a means by which they can continue their existence; for an artist to exist it is not only necessary that he should secure a minimum of economic independence but also that minimum of understanding and encouragement without which he cannot paint, carve, write or compose. From this point of view, fortunately, the situation today is definitely better than it was a century ago when a wave of intellectual immigrants from Germany came to live in the United States in the atmosphere of freedom that was denied them in their native land. Few of these immigrants pursued on this continent their previous intellectual occupations, but those who did, for instance organizers of concerts in Boston and New York or exponents of Hegelian philosophy, benefited this country.

On the atlas of civilization culture is like a sea finding its level, a liquid following the laws of communicating vases. For instance when French Gothic sculpture became known in Italy, Italian art benefited and Italy repaid by acquainting France and Flanders with the works of her early Florentine masters. If the excellence attained by the painters and sculptors of the Paris School is to have a future, the work of the immigrant artist must be grafted to American life. For this graft to be successful the following prerequisites are necessary: the American should try to understand the European artist's aims; the European should try to grasp the contradiction between the cultural conditions of North America and Europe. Fur-

NOTES

thermore it is necessary for the pioneers in culture of both continents to agree on their outlook on the future. I will now comment briefly on these three points:

I. CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES IN EUROPEAN ART

It is easy to recognize in European art two fundamental tendencies. The one concerns itself primarily with problems of form, artists of the second tendency search for causes within the human being and direct their attention to problems of the unconscious and its images. What abstraction is for the artists of the first group, symbolism (in the Freudian sense) is for artists of the second group. Some well-known artists, among them the "Neoromantics," follow neither of these extreme tendencies and instead of searching for final causes in images or forms illustrate "the spirit of things," in other words what they consider beautiful in combinations of lines and colors and in subject, takes precedence over discovery.

Although it is much too soon to write a history of European artists in America, it is possible to indicate the aspects of American life that will influence more particularly each type of artist. The first group, influenced directly or indirectly by Cubism, will seek to discover in the American scene new combinations of form color and volume; for the second group, Surrealists, the American scene will again serve as medium but for the discovery of new dreams and myths. To properly understand the results obtained by the first group a powerful intellectual effort is needed, therefore this art should be called intelligent; the second must be termed inspiring because it is an art that provokes shocks and surprises of far reaching consequences. The Neoromantics, by a combination of anecdote and essential qualities, use the American scene

Reg 514,908

First row from left to right
Matta Echaurren
Ossip Zadkine
Yves Tanguy
Max Ernst
Marc Chagall
Fernand Léger

Second row from left to right
André Breton
Piet Mondrian
André Masson
Amedee Ozenfant
Jacques Lipchitz
Pavel Tchelitchew
Kurt Seligmann
Eugene Berman

Photograph by
George Platt Lynes

New York, Feb. 1942

as a medium for harmonizing the eternal contradiction between the universal (such elements as sky, water and earth) and the personal (for instance memories of other places). As those terms, the intelligent, the inspiring and the beautiful, partly overlap in meaning, so the artists of one of these groups sometimes influence artists of the other groups. The theory of communicating vases can again be applied.

II. THE CONTRADICTION — EUROPE-NORTH AMERICA

The European artist is too often inclined to forget the difference between the cultural background of North America and Europe. The United States is the first country of pure Protestant background to become an important factor in the cultural life of our times. Most Protestant countries of Europe never succeeded in entirely breaking away from the influence of Catholicism be it for geographical or historical reasons. The Protestant in his cultural outlook is more interested in Truth than in Beauty, while the Catholic sees the value of Beauty better than the Protestant. Under the influence of the Protestant conception which was so well adapted to the needs and the adventurous spirit of the early pioneer, the search for Truth helped the United States to become what she is today. But whenever there is a crisis in culture the need to reconsider the accepted point of view is felt. A reshifting of the position or order of values in a sort of intellectual shakeup must then take place. I believe that in these cases an exchange of ideas can always help to avoid pernicious consequences. This brings me to the third and last point of my comment.

III. THE FUTURE

For a new cultural trend to have positive results it must be historically correctly located. When surveying

the history of art it becomes surprisingly clear what profound effect the exchange between the Orient and the Occident had upon the culture of Europe. When the land route to India fell under the control of Greece, the Greek conception of life became the predominant one; when next the Arabs blocked the route to India, Europe went through a new cultural phase, the Middle Ages. On the discovery of a sea route around the Cape of Good Hope the influence of the Moslem world was neutralized and a new era of civilization started in Europe. The dream of Alexander the Great, of Pompey, of Napoleon — the conquest of India by the land route — has become once again a living issue. But the days of the "civilization of the Atlantic route" may very well come to an end without the land road to the East falling under the control of a European power. What if the Pacific becomes the most important sea route between the Occident and the Orient?

The artist to be historically situated must not forget that he is looking into the future not from Paris, in the years following Vasco de Gama's triumphant return from India to Europe, but from a continent between two oceans. In these oceans loaded ships sink and carry under some of man's proudest dreams.

NICOLAS CALAS